

STEVE KAPLAN

HIDDEN TOOLS OF COMEDY



THE SERIOUS
BUSINESS OF BEING
FUNNY

point of impact



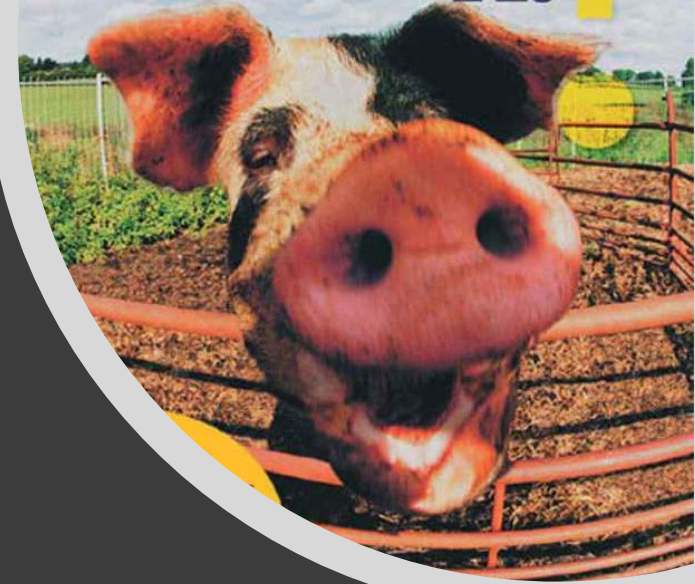
What Are You Laughing At?

A Comprehensive Guide
to the Comedic Event

Dan O'Shannon

What Are You Laughing At

"At last. A how-to book by someone who actually
KNOWS HOW TO." - Larry Gelbart, M.A.'88 (TV, Tootsie)



The Comedic Event & Humor
through *The Good Place*

The Myths of Comedy

“Comedy comes in threes.”

“Comedy is exaggeration.”

“Comedy is mechanical.”

“Comedy is about feeling superior to other people. ”

“You have to be born funny.”

“If you try to explain the joke, you’ll kill it.”

“Comedy is making fun of other people.”

“Comedy is only about timing.”

“Comedy is easy.”



The Comedy Perception Test

Here are 7 word-pictures. There's no backstory to them. Read them carefully and discuss:

1. Man slipping on a banana peel.
2. Man wearing a top hat slipping on a banana peel.
3. Man slipping on a banana peel after kicking a dog.
4. Man slipping on a banana peel after losing his job.
5. Blind man slipping on a banana peel.
6. Blind man's dog slipping on a banana peel.
7. Man slipping on a banana peel, and dying.

Which of these statements is:

- the funniest?
- the least funny?
- the most comic?
- the least comic?

The answer is... (Theory of Comedy)

All of them!

What's funny is
whatever makes
YOU laugh.

Theory of Comedy

If you are laughing
(even on-the-inside-
kind-of laughing),
it's funny.

But... is it comedy?



Funny vs. Comic

You can make a baby laugh dangling keys, pulling out your tongue, but is it comedy?



So... What is comedy???



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What is comedy?

- A heightened sense of reality
- Timing
- Exaggeration
- Slapstick
- Silliness
- Reversals
- Something in threes
- Irony
- The absurdity of life
- The unexpected
- Creating and releasing tension
- Incongruity
- A psychological defense mechanism
- Bad karma
- Surprise
- Tragedy for someone else
- Irony
- Revenge
- Satire
- Pain, especially other people's
- Irreverence
- Sarcasm
- Miscommunication
- Something relatable

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Also applicable to drama!

What is comedy?



- One of the most ancient art forms
- With its own aesthetic
- Without much respect (unlike tragedy)

‘The art of telling the truth about people, about what it’s like to be human (...) [while] drama helps us dream about what we could be.’ (Kaplan, 2013)

The comic equation

- Comedy is:
 - About an ordinary guy or gal: a mess, a less than perfect person
 - Struggling against insurmountable odds: whatever your struggle, you know it ain't easy
 - Without many of the required skills and tools with which to win
 - Yet never giving up hope!

The background of the slide features several thin, curved lines in a light gray color, some solid and some dashed, creating a sense of motion or a stylized globe. On the left side, there is a blue graphic element consisting of a horizontal bar at the top and a larger rectangular box below it. The word "Task" is written in white inside the larger box.

Task

- Now go back to your worksheet, and reconsider your previous answers to the most/least funny and comic 7 words-in-pictures statements.

Watch: *TGP* S0101

- Grammar exercises + collect
- Explain humor general pattern according to GTVH
- Humor exercises

Mechanisms of humor according to the GTVH

GTVH stands for General Theory of Verbal Humor

Language

- Linguistic devices. How humor is constructed.

Narrative strategy

- Genre, kinds of humor (riddles, teases, story jokes...)

Target

- The butt of the joke (not in all humor episodes)

Situation

- Context, settings, characters

Logical Mechanism

- Solving the incongruity (referential, phonological...)

Script Opposition

- Shared by the community, abstract, rely on personal experience, change over time.

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The Logical Mechanism is the resolution of the Script Opposition

What about the humor in *TGP S0101*?

Let's review a few scenes.

Joke – structure:

- 1. framing
- 2. story/telling → **jab line** → introduced to designate humor **within** the body of a text, as opposed to the punch line, which is always placed at the end.
 - Functionally identical to the punch line except it can be positioned anywhere within the text, not just at the end.
 - fully integrated in the narrative (i.e., they do not disrupt the flow of the narrative, because they either are indispensable to the development of the 'plot' or of the text, or they are not antagonistic to it)"
- 3. **punch line** → intended to make the audience laugh. **Conclusion** of the joke.

Failure in humor



Script oppositions only succeed if the script is available to the hearer.



Not all opposing script juxtaposition create amusing incongruities.



Many script oppositions require specific cultural knowledge to appreciate.

Failure in humor (noticed by the sender)

5 strategies

1. Change the topic asap.
2. Inoculation → 'I'm just kidding' / 'bad joke, I know'
3. Coaxing or exhorting your hearer → 'Come on! That was funny!'
4. When silence or very little laughter, joke explicitly explained.
pause + identify the joke - 'that was a joke' - + instruct hearers to laugh – 'you can laugh now')
5. Redirecting the humor to make fun of oneself (to avoid discomfort in the hearer)

What if I just
don't get it?!



You didn't recognize it



You didn't understand it



You are missing one of the script
oppositions



Your **personality** and **creativity**

Personality
and humor: 3
dimensions

Let's do the SHQ-6
Revised
Questionnaire
(Svebak, 2015)

4

3

2

1

- 1. Do you easily recognize a mark of humorous intent?

☐ Very easy

☐ Fairly easy

☐ Fairly slowly

☐ Very slowly

- 2. People who are always out to be funny are really irresponsible types not to be relied upon.

☐ Not at all

☐ To some degree

☐ To a high degree

☐ Yes, indeed

- 3. Do you consider yourself to be a mirthful/merry/happy person?

☐ Yes indeed

☐ To a high degree

☐ To some degree

☐ Not at all

- 4. Would you easily find something humorous in most situations if you really tried?

☐ Very easy

☐ Fairly easy

☐ Fairly difficult

☐ Very difficult

- 5. Humorists irritate me because they so blatantly/openly enjoy getting others to laugh.

☐ Not at all

☐ To some degree

☐ To a high degree

☐ Yes indeed

- 6. Do you easily smile and laugh?

☐ Very easy

☐ Fairly easy

☐ Fairly difficult

☐ Very difficult

Personality
and humor: 3
dimensions

Cognitive

- Items 1 & 4

Social

- Items 2 & 5

Affective

- Items 3 & 6



What is creativity?

- Creative activity has been described as involving the mental and physical processes of remembering, organizing, imaging, expressing, and evaluating



What is creativity?

- how individuals interact with their environment
- often entails new ways of seeing old problems or becoming aware of new problems (Cornelius & Casler, 1991)
- creativity is the ability to be different in a useful way (Kaplan, 2018)

novel or original and useful or adaptive

(Feist, 1998)

How to measure creativity?



1. CREATIVITY TESTS
 - CREATIVITY TESTS
 - **BIOGRAPHICAL INVENTORIES**
 - BEHAVIORAL ASSESSMENTS



2. OBJECTIVE ANALYSIS OF PRODUCTS



3. SUBJECTIVE JUDGEMENTS

Personality
and humor: 3
dimensions

Cognitive

- Items 1 & 4

Social

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Affective

- Items 3 & 6

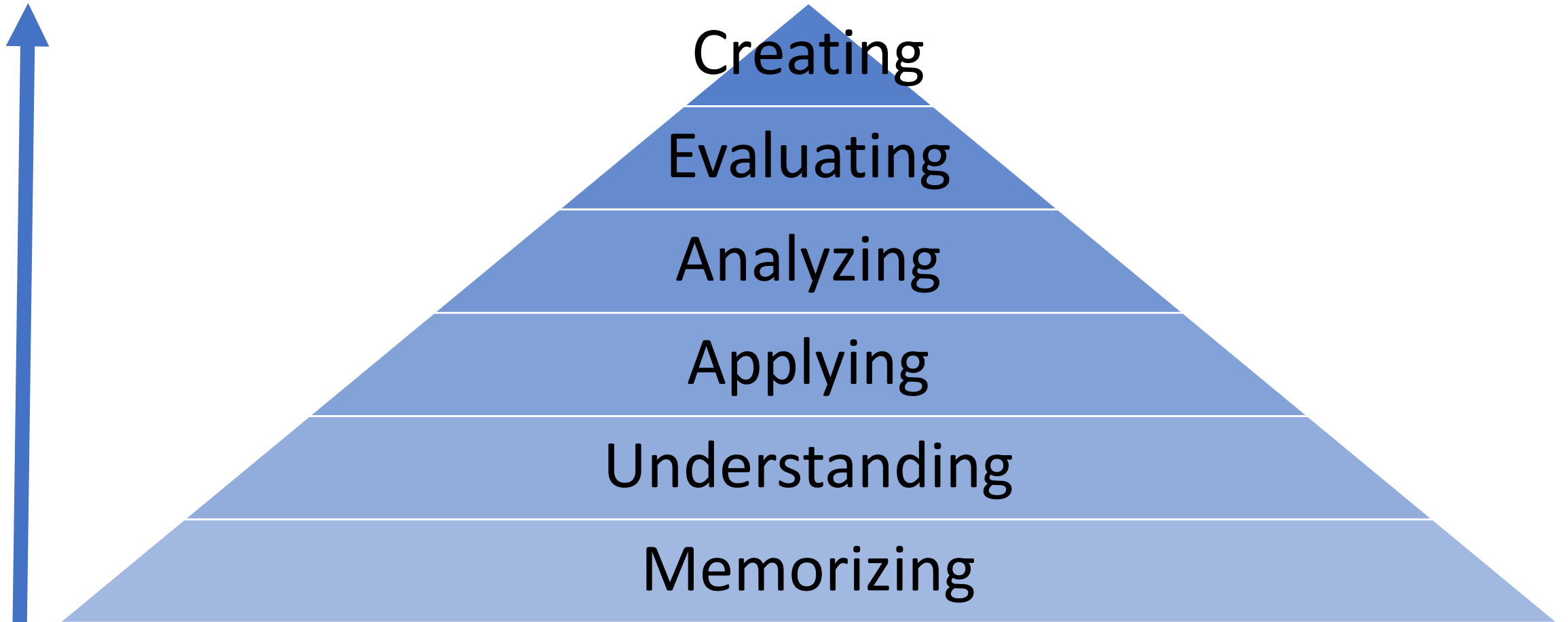
Learning: 3
dimensions

Cognitive

Socio-affective

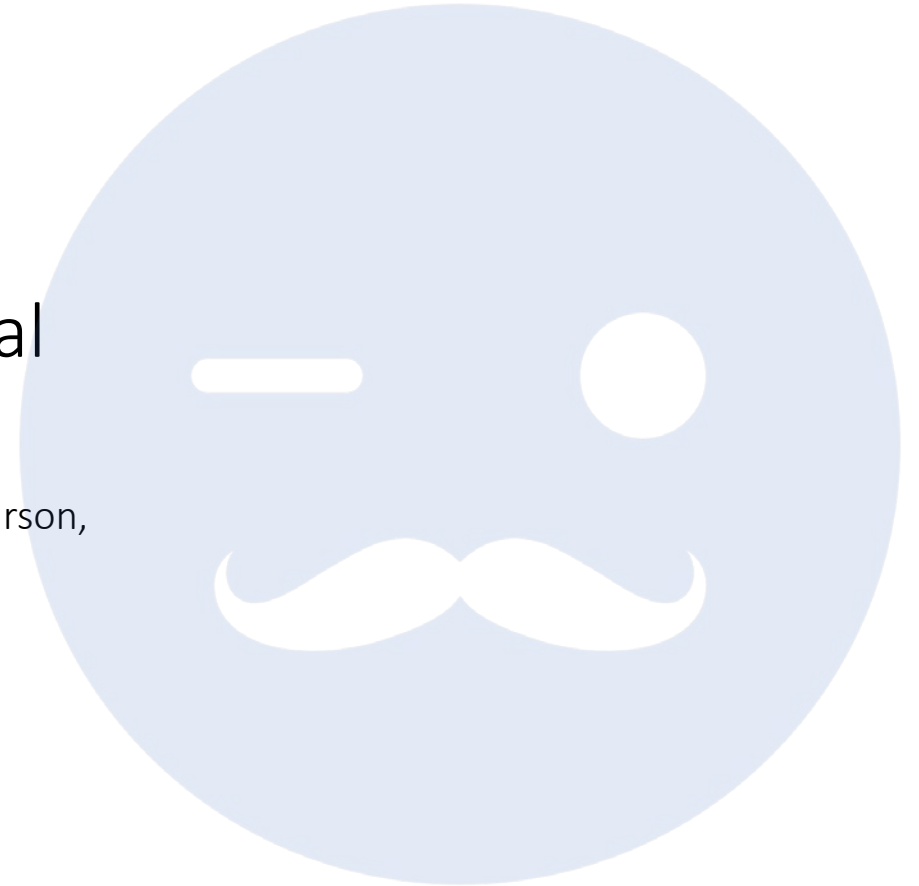
Psychomotricity

Cognitive dimensions





Let's get to know each other
better through our biographical
creative inventory: Creative
Achievement Questionnaire (Carson,
Peterson, & Higgins, 2005)



Morale behind it all

If a joke is not funny to you, this doesn't necessarily mean you didn't understand it

Or you actually didn't!

1. English as a Foreign Language
2. sociocultural knowledge
3. (humor personality + creativity)



What about jokes
within a comedy?

The joke may not be
addressed to you, viewer!

Three scenarios

Contrived intentional humor

- A character's production of an utterance and communication of a meaning with a view to amuse → Dr House teasing Cuddy and Foreman at times.

Contrived unintentional humor

- Funny characters *per se* (silly, inept) → Joe from *Friends*, Baldrick from *Blackadder*

Contrived unintended humor

- What the character says has no humorous intention yet it makes you laugh. And so, those characters themselves become the butt of the joke.

Types of humor – SHQ + characters in TGP



SHQ by © Rod A. Martin, Ph.D.,
2003 → do for oneself



Apply to characters

Scoring

Affiliative Humor: 1*, 5, 9*, 13, 17*, 21, 25*, 29*

Self-Enhancing Humor: 2, 6, 10, 14, 18, 22*, 26, 30

Aggressive Humor: 3, 7*, 11, 15*, 19, 23*, 27, 31*

Self-Defeating Humor: 4, 8, 12, 16*, 20, 24, 28, 32

Items marked with * are reverse keyed; i.e., 1=7, 2=6, 3=5, 4=4, 5=3, 6=2, 7=1

After reversing these items, sum across all 8 items in each scale to obtain scale totals.

Types of humor: characters' personality & interpretation

Affiliative Humor: tendency to share humor with others, tell jokes and funny stories, amuse others, make others laugh, enjoy laughing along with others

Self-Enhancing Humor: tendency to maintain a humorous outlook on life even when not with others, use humor in coping with stress, cheer oneself up with humor

Aggressive Humor: tendency to use humor to disparage/denigrate, put down, or manipulate others; use of ridicule, offensive humor; compulsive expression of humor even when inappropriate

Self-Defeating Humor: tendency to amuse others at one's own expense, self-disparaging humor; laughing along with others when being ridiculed or put down; using humor to hide one's true feelings from self and others

Source

Martin, R. A., Puhlik-Doris, P., Larsen, G., Gray, J., & Weir, K. (2003). Individual differences in uses of humor and their relation to psychological well-being: Development of the Humor Styles Questionnaire. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 37, 48-75.